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ABSTRACT

A program designed to serve culturally different gifted elementary students in the Omaha (Nebraska) Public Schools is described. Following a brief rationale, information on the program's identification procedures lists 12 typical characteristics of culturally diverse gifted students. Possible program approaches are delineated, including (1) helping students develop better self concepts and pride in their work; (2) building on students' strengths; (3) developing students' creative thinking processes; (4) working from lower to higher cognitive levels at appropriate rates; (5) using role play, simulations, and problem-solving techniques to teach new concepts/materials; (6) gearing instruction to students' preferred learning styles; (7) making the curriculum relevant; (8) avoiding unnecessary economic demands; (9) recognizing and utilizing the richness of cultural diversity; (10) using community resources; (11) counseling students; and (12) personalizing and humanizing the curriculum. The program's development is traced from its inception in 1979 to workshops for teachers, pilot programs, summer school enrichment programs, and dissemination of the model through conference presentations and written documents. Seventy-one references are cited and evaluation instruments used in the project are described in the appendix. (CL)

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BUILDING BRIDGES
FOR CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENTS

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BUILDING BRIDGES FOR CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENTS

The Omaha Public School District of Omaha, Nebraska is in the process of developing a program to serve culturally diverse gifted students who are not identified through the traditional identification procedure used by the district. This paper will detail the rationale, procedures, time line, instruments and bibliography used in this project.

DEFINITION

The Omaha Public School District has defined Culturally Diverse Gifted and Talented Children as children who by reason of cultural identification and socio-economic status have not been able to assimilate themselves into the dominant culture. The designation "culturally diverse" is used because their behavior patterns and responses vary from the typical indicators of giftedness and talent observed in the dominant culture, for example, high IQ scores or proficiency in the dominant language.

GOALS

The Omaha Public School District has set the following long range goals for the Culturally Diverse Gifted Student Project:

(1) Help culturally diverse gifted students develop their academic strengths.
(2) Encourage these students to increase their self-motivation toward educational tasks.
(3) Provide opportunities for success in academic and talent areas to enhance the student's self-concept.
(4) Encourage these students toward regular school attendance, completion of high school, and, if desirable, post-high school education opportunities.
(5) Counsel students and parents to set realistic and attainable career goals commensurate with each student's talent and ability.

RATIONALE

The family, community and cultural background that a child experiences before he starts school largely determines his attitude to, and success in school. If the values of the home, community and school are consistent, the child will be as successful as his innate ability, self-concept and internal motivation allow. However, if the attributes inherent in school success are lacking or devalued by the child's family or community, the chances of school success are greatly diminished. In the case of gifted children this results in a level of underachievement that can be detrimental not only to the intellectual and social development of the individual child, but

to the total society as well.

Research has shown that intellectually gifted children require instruction that is differentiated longitudinally, horizontally, and in kind from those students of average or below average ability. Therefore, it is imperative that students who are capable of intellectually advanced performance be identified early in their school careers and their programs modified to allow the greatest possible provision for the development of their unique capabilities.

Identification of intellectually gifted students has traditionally been based on scores of IQ or standardized achievement tests, and/or classroom performance. These identification practices have resulted in gifted classes containing predominantly white, upper-middle class, high achievers, and, in the primary grades at least, more girls than boys. Conspicuous by their absence are the highly intelligent underachievers, ethnic and racial minorities, and those from poor economic backgrounds.

Recent research shows evidence that standardized tests may be culturally biased, and are not accurate predictors of culturally diverse students' gifted capabilities. Classroom performance is usually judged by standards normed on dominant culture values and expectations, and any deviation from these standards may result in the student's exclusion from enrichment programming through teacher nomination. Since authorities agree that potential intelligence and talent are equally distributed throughout the total population, it is obvious that a great many potentially gifted students in our schools are overlooked.

Cultural diversity historically has been one of the strengths of our country's development. It is imperative that we understand those qualities that are valued by the various cultural groups that make up our population. Rather than trying to make all gifted children fit one mold as prescribed by the values of the dominant culture, we must understand and accept the idea that the individual has a right to differ from the dominant culture; and at the same time, he/she has a responsibility to use his/her talents within its framework.

If we are going to identify the culturally diverse gifted students in our schools, we must take into consideration the characteristics of these children which relate to the criteria of success acceptable in their cultural groups. Much research has been done to determine characteristics exhibited by members of specific cultural groups; but most of it has been undertaken to provide a basis for remediation--thus documenting weaknesses. In searching for potentially gifted students, Torrance and other researchers have repeatedly stressed that we should build from these students' strengths--not remediate their weaknesses.

In the past decade, many culture-fair tests have been published, and some of the established tests adapted to allow for cultural differences. However, because culturally diverse children are often less verbal, more fearful, and less self-confident in a testing situation, their true abilities may not become evident from any test data, regardless of which test is used.

To offset this effect, some districts have eliminated the use of all test scores in the identification process and have relied on observation of class performance, teacher checklists and nominations by teachers, peers, parents or self. This method is often even less effective since it is so highly subjective.

The most promising approach to the identification of culturally diverse gifted students seems to lie in the use of a matrix which combines the objectivity of test scores, statistical data and background information, with the more subjective behavioral checklist, characteristic scale, observable performance, and nomination. All available information pertaining to the student is positioned on a matrix according to a weighted scale. After all information is recorded, the columns are added and a total score is computed. Scores are arranged in decreasing order and a cut-off score established. Students scoring above the cut-off point would then be considered for program inclusion. In this way, a highly creative child whose test scores were low could score as high as the less creative, but better test-oriented student who consistently gets high grades and test scores.

In determining the items to include on an identification matrix it is important to consider the characteristics of the target group, as well as the program approaches to be used when the group has been identified. The following lists of characteristics of culturally diverse gifted students, and program approaches to be used with them have been adapted from many of the sources listed in the bibliography appended to this paper.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENTS

(1) Are physically oriented.
(2) Learn well through manipulative materials.
(3) Have high nonverbal fluency.
(4) Learn better through games, simulations and role playing than through lecture or reading.
(5) Are creative.
(6) Display leadership abilities, though not always in socially acceptable ways.
(7) Are problem oriented.
(8) Are good at problem solving when problems are concrete and practical.
(9) Are family and community oriented.
(10) Focus on people, activities and objects rather than on concepts and abstractions.

(11)Often distrust authority.
(12)Often have poor self-concept which can lead to defensive, disturbing or belligerent behavior.

PROGRAM APPROACHES FOR CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENTS

(1) Build on student strengths - don't just remediate weaknesses.
(2) Help students develop better self-concept and pride in their work.
(3) Develop the student's creative thinking processes.
(4) Work from lower cognitive levels to higher ones as student is ready for them.
(5) Use role play, simulations and problem-solving techniques to teach new concepts and material rather than relying on lecture and reading assignments.
(6) Gear instruction to the student's preferred learning style.
(7) Make curriculum relevant to real-live situations.
(8) Avoid unnecessary economic demands.
(9) Recognize and incorporate into the curriculum the richness of cultural diversity.
(10)Use community resources, including those of the student's background.
(11)Counsel students to deal with their own discouragement as well as the misunderstanding of their peers, parents and community.
(12)Personalize and humanize the curriculum.

PROCEDURES AND TIME LINE

Summer,1979

Workshop with James Curry,Coordinator, National/State Leadership Training Institute on the Gifted and Talented, to write long-range plan for gifted education program in the Omaha Public Schools. Concern raised about identification of potentially gifted, culturally diverse students.

Workshop with Dr. Mary Frasier, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology and Co-Coordinator, Programs for the Gifted, University of Georgia, to consider identification of and progamming for potentially gifted, culturally diverse students.

September 1979-June 1980

Title IV-C ESEA Minigrant written to provide funding for identification of and programming for potentially gifted culturally diverse students. For research and evaluation this minigrant was supplemented with funds from an ESAA grant.

Review of related literature conducted.

Selection of pilot schools - initially four elementary schools were involved in the identification process.

Search made for culturally-fair identification instrument.

September 1980-June 1981

Selection of Learning Style Identification Scale (LSIS) as initial identification instrument.

Addition of fifth elementary pilot school.

Distribution of LSIS forms to schools, completion of LSIS forms by teachers of all children in grades 2-6. LSIS forms scored by gifted education office personnel.

LSIS forms returned to schools with students listed according to learning styles. At an inservice meeting teachers in each school were shown how to interpret scores for each learning style, what characteristics the behaviors represented, and how to provide appropriate intervention techniques to deal with these behaviors.

Students who appeared in either of the two learning styles selected for our identification procedure were further screened by use of statistical information available in school records to determine areas of strength in subject areas and/or delimiting cultural factors. Those students fulfilling these requirements,and who were not already listed as 'gifted' by conventional methods were considered for further study.

The information for these students was put on a matrix developed to use the statistical and cultural information available from Omaha Public School District records.

Teachers in the five pilot schools were asked to fill out creativity and leadership checklists for the selected students. This information was added to the student's matrix.

In the five pilot schools initial screening using the LSIS was completed for 1,248 students in grades 2-6. Of these 418 were identified in the two learning styles used in this project, and

138 of these students qualified as culturally diverse gifted students on the basis of strengths displayed on the matrix.

The matrix information of these 138 students was submitted to Selection Research, Inc. for internal validation. After studying their reports and recommendations it was decided to develop a profile of each student's areas of strength rather than use a numerical cut off score for program inclusion. Profile forms were developed and included in each student's cumulative school records.

Enrichment materials were selected by the teachers in the pilot schools, and purchased for these schools by the gifted office through an ESAA grant. The teachers in these schools were invited to join other elementary teachers from the district in a summer workshop conducted by Susan Kovalic, Educational Consulting Associates, to explore methods of providing enrichment in the classroom for gifted students.

Summer, 1981

Two summer school classes were held for identified gifted culturally diverse students who had completed grades 2-4. Emphasis was on providing enrichment awareness activities, enhancing self-concept, and developing internal motivation in school related activities.

56 teachers attended the 3 day workshop conducted by Susan Kovalic.

A handbook for identification of and programmming suggestions for culturally diverse gifted students was printed for distribution to interested teachers and administrators in the Omaha Public School District.

September, 1981-June, 1982

A series of six in-service meetings was offered to any elementary teacher in the district who was interested in identifying culturally diverse gifted students in his/her classroom. 13 teachers from 7 schools completed this in-service.

The Culturally Diverse Gifted Student identification procedure was implemented at a sixth elementary school.

Sandra Black, consultant from The Thinking Works, and the University of Northern Florida, conducted a workshop to evaluate material and plan curriculum for use with culturally divese gifted students. This workshop was attended by members of the

gifted staff, supervisory staff of the Instruction Department, human-community relations consultants, and teachers of the project's pilot schools. This workshop was funded by The Midwest Race Desegregation Assistance Center, College of Education, Manhattan, Kansas.

Summer,1982

Due to budgetary restrictions no summer school programs were offered in 1982.

With the help of the Midwest Race Desegregation Center a second workshop led by Sandra Black was offered for teachers throughout the Omaha Public School District. 42 teachers from 23 schools attended this workshop. Materials were distributed to each teacher to be used and evaluated in his/her classroom.

September,1982-June,1983

A meeting was held with the participating teachers from the summer workshop. At this time a compilation of their material evaluations was distributed, and successes shared.

With the assistance of the Midwest Race Desegregation Assistance Center a Saturday workshop was held for parents of identified culturally diverse gifted students. Dr. Mary Frasier and Sandra Black were the featured workshop leaders. 39 parents, teachers, and administrators met to explore ways that the home and school could work together to enhance these children's talents and abilities.

A parent/child workshop planned as a follow-up experience to the parent workshop had to be postponed due to time and budgetary constraints.

Summer,1983

Two summer school enrichment classes were again offered to identified culturally diverse gifted students who had completed grades 2-5.

A presentation was given at the CEC National Conference on the Exceptional Black Child at Atlanta,Georgia, July 26,1983. This presentation outlined the background and implementation of the Omaha Public School's Culturally Diverse Student Project to date.

A revision of the handbook, Focus on Programs for the Culturally

Diverse Gifted was started.

Future Plans 1983-1984

The identification process for this project will be implemented in at least one more school, with a possibility of implementing it in two others if time permits.

Records of students identified for this project will be developed as computer files so that on-going records will be easily and quickly accessible.

If time, staff and budget permit, enrichment classes will be offered to identified students during the school year.

The parent/student workshop postponed in the spring of 1983 will be scheduled in late fall or early winter.

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INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENT PROJECT

Omaha Public Schools

Omaha, Nebraska

THE LEARNING STYLE IDENTIFICATION SCALE (LSIS)
Rating, Scoring and Profiling Form

Paul J. Malcom,Ed.D., William C. Lutz,M.S., Mary Gerken,M.S., and Gary Hoeltke,Ed.D.

Publishers Test Service, CTB/McGraw-Hill,Inc.
2500 Garden Road, Monterey, CA 93940

The LSIS is a list of twenty-four behavioral statements which are rated on a scale of 1 through 5, with 1 indicating that the student does not display the behavior at all, and 5 indicating that the student displays the behavior to a large degree.

Six of the twenty-four statements describe each learning style represented in this inventory. The four learning styles indicate varying combinations of the amount of internal and external information the student receives and uses, his or her cognitive development, and his or her self-concept.

Students identified as gifted by OPS district criteria were found to exhibit one learning style predominantly. Culturally diverse students who displayed this same learning style, but who did not qualify as gifted by district criteria were considered for further screening in the culturaly diverse gifted student identification project.

The behavioral characteristics of one of the other learning styles were very similar to the characteristics of culturally diverse gifted students as reported in the existant research. The students from the pilot project who exhibited this learning style were also considered for further screening.

Sample statements from LSIS are:

Can plan and reach short- or long-range goals
Is belligerently outspoken about what is disliked
Excessively seeks approval of teacher
Sees relationships between ideas and things that others do not
Requires step-by-step instructions to complete tasks

CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENT IDENTIFICATION MATRIX

developed by:
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Adapted from Baldwin

Information about the students selected for further screening was recorded on a matrix which was developed to include pertinent information available from the student's school records as well as teacher and student input.

Academic information includes:

Group intelligence test scores: verbal and non-verbal (Lorge/Thorndike tests are given in grades 3 and 6)

Standardized achievement test scores: reading,math, language arts and reference skills (CAT tests are given each year in grades 1-6)

Composite grades:reading, math, language arts (average of composite grades for each subject entered each year by classroom teacher)

Cultural information includes:

Learning style:determined by LSIS

Race

Sex

SES:determined by parental presence in the home, and free or reduced lunch applications

Language: determined by the extent of use of a second language in the home

Number of schools attended

Teacher/student input information includes:

Creativity: determined by a creativity checklist completed by classroom teacher

Leadership: determined by a leadership checklist completed by classroom teacher, and by a peer leadership nomination instrument used with the whole class

Self-concept and school attitude: determined by the S.C.A.L. Scale filled out by student.

TEACHER CHECKLISTS FOR CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENTS

developed by:
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Creativity and leadership checklists were completed on each of the students in the group for which matrices were filled out. In the initial pilot group this amounted to approximately two to four students per classroom. A list of behavioral statements was checked as high, average or low for each student. The student's weighted score was then entered on the matrix.

A peer leadership nomination instrument was used with the whole class. Each student received a score determined by his/her position within the top three nominations for each item.

Sample items from these checklists are:

CREATIVITY (15 items)

Has a good sense of humor
Has a wide range of interests
Is a risk-taker
Is impatient with rote work

LEADERSHIP (8 items)

Can organize group activities
Can articulate group's ideas
Can influence peers positively or negatively

PEER LEADERSHIP NOMINATION (10 items)

Name the child in your room who you would pick to be leader of a group project
Name the child in your room who could covince you to break a school rule
Name the child in your room who is the bossiest

S.C.A.L. SCALE

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One of the major goals of the culturally diverse gifted student project is to enhance the student's self-concept and increase his/her internal motivation toward educational tasks. The S.C.A.L. Scale is a checklist of twenty-seven statements which can be given in written or oral form to a group of students to determine their attitude toward school learning. The students answer each statement yes or no depending on how they feel about the statement. Besides giving an indication of the student's feelings about school and learning, this checklist also gives insight into the student's perception of himself/herself in relation to the other students in the class.

Sample statements from this scale are:

I like to go to school
I think that most kids are smarter than I am
I learn school work easily
I think of good things to say in class
My teacher thinks I'm smart

CULTURALLY DIVERSE GIFTED STUDENT PROFILE

developed by:
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A student profile sheet containing information from the student's matrix is completed for each student in the project. This profile sheet is filed with the student's school records. The profile sheet includes the cultural information which qualifies the student for the culturally diverse gifted student project, as well as the areas of academic strength and weakness as displayed at the time of identification. Suggested activities are listed which will help teachers to build on the student's areas of strength.

A list of students identified by this project is sent to the principal of each school. This list gives students' names, grades and areas of strength.

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